

How Do Children Read?
Case Studies of Ten Children's
Classroom Reading Strategies

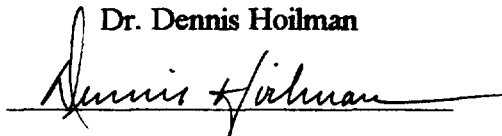
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dennis Hoilman", is written over a horizontal line.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how children read. Using a case-study approach, I interviewed ten randomly chosen first-grade students from Burris Laboratory School. Before conducting the interviews, I formulated eight assumptions. Discussion of these assumptions and the research on which they are based constitute Part I of this study. Then, I interviewed the children individually, questioning them about their reading likes and dislikes. Summaries of each of these fifteen-minute interviews and accompanying photos of the children reading in their classroom constitute Part II of this study. In the conclusion, I compare my assumptions to the actual responses of the children and make some recommendations for how the data collected could be used.

In the last section of this thesis, I show some information not directly related to my research but connected. First, I include some statistics from the children's book market. The book prices and book sales figures from the past 16 years clearly indicate that book sales are down. Second, I collect ideas from my own experiences and from articles in reading journals as a guide for parents or teachers who want to try some new techniques for getting children excited about reading. This study demonstrates what adults can do, either as authors, teachers, or parents, to help children become more involved with reading.

Part I

Background of the Study

Introduction

Last year, I took a course in children's literature at Westminster College in Oxford. This was my first encounter as an adult with this genre, and I was not sure what to expect. What I found was that in the end, looking at children's literature seriously is the same as looking at adult literature, but most of the time, there is more to look at. For instance, in picture books, one must not only analyze the content but the codes of cover, color scheme, placement, and how the pictures clarify the written text.

I was amazed to learn that studying children's literature could be just as complicated as studying adult literature. I began to wonder if children analyzed books as they read. I remember that as a child I read avidly. My mother would drive to the library with shopping bags to aid us in carrying the treasures I would find that day. Because of my parents' encouragement and my curious mind, reading became second nature to me. What better entertainment could there be than to fill my mind with books, books, and more books? Now, as a college student re-reading those old favorites like Where the Wild Things Are, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, and The Enormous Crocodile, I have become jealous of children today. I cannot read in the same way I did when I was a child. How did I read?

The case studies I administered were intended to provide insight into children's classroom reading strategies. The case studies were done in the environment where the children read. At Burris Laboratory School, where the studies were done, there is a reading corner in Mrs. Gluff's first-grade classroom. Instead of asking children to read at their desks, Mrs. Gluff made the reading corner to provide the students with a comfortable environment. The seating is mostly soft chairs, such as pillows or bean bags. The colors of the furniture and the wall hangings in this area are vibrant, stimulating children to feel awake and alert rather than bored or enclosed. Initial observation of the reading corner helped me to discover the stimulants and environment necessary for these children to be effective readers. Second, I performed interviews with ten of the students. I asked

questions to discern the background and preferences that each child had in reading. Third, I took photographs that captured moments when children appeared to be involved in their reading. The photographs were not taken for my benefit but for the benefit of anyone reading my thesis. Any child can say that he/she thoroughly enjoys reading, but not every child can show their attachment to books. People who read my research later can see the looks of joy and energy on the children's faces as they read independently or with classmates. These visual aids, I think, say more than any interview or academic analysis of reading styles could. Last, I did research at the library for two reasons. First, I wanted to discover what the current buying trends for children's literature are compared to the past. Are sales up or down? I think the results I found in Bowker's Annual are both interesting and significant. Second, I tried to find personal experiences that students, teachers, or parents had with children reading. What are some ideas they have found successful in cultivating children's interests in reading?

I did not search for all-encompassing results about children's reading because there can be no single rule or result. Children's reading is an individual thing. No two children read in exactly the same manner. Sharon Kane said, "How does one read? The answers lie within the individual children in our classes, not in any textbook, not in any research report" (531). Any conclusions I made from my research were based only on the ten children interviewed in this specific class.

The ten children selected are certainly not representative of the average American first-grader. They attend Burris Laboratory School, a school that was created for the Teacher's College at Ball State University. "The students at Burris are guinea pigs on which prospective teachers can try out new teaching techniques," said Mrs. Gluff, first-grade teacher at Burris. Mrs. Gluff explained that the difference between Burris Laboratory School and the average public elementary school is that parents specifically choose the school. Some parents have to drive far to get their children to the school every day. Normally, which school children attend is decided by geographic location. Children

are chosen by lot at Burris. Mrs. Gluff said, "Some people are under the incorrect belief that Burris is a private school, but in actuality, we have children of all races, abilities, and social classes. In my first-grade classroom, the children's reading abilities range from a first-grade to a ninth-grade reading level. After parents apply, selection is decided by random draw only. It does not cost more than the average school either." Mrs. Gluff did admit that parents with children at Burris are, on the average, more concerned about the quality of education. They have made an active choice, some of them at an inconvenience, that their child will be better off at Burris Laboratory School.

A major advantage of having a child attend Burris is that the students get more personal attention, since the school has to limit the number of students who can attend. Also, children at Burris have a lot more creative experiences since Ball State education majors come in daily to practice teaching techniques. The sample of children I interviewed and observed, then, is one with advantages, not necessarily of an intellectual or monetary nature. The parents of these children are, on the average, more concerned about their children's reading than the average parent.

What is the goal of this project? First, I wanted to see for myself the many ways children use reading in their lives. Some children prefer books on tape, while some may prefer the traditional codex (bound book) style. Still others need action combined with their reading. For instance, acting out a scene from a book may grab the interest of kinesthetic, action-oriented children.

Second, I think parents and teachers need to understand that reading is not standardized. Every child needs different things to thoroughly enjoy reading. Parents who have a "bookworm" as an eldest child may be dismayed when they discover their second child cannot concentrate long enough to read as many books as the first child. Parents and teachers should learn to discover each child's strengths and weaknesses. In Marie Carbo's "Reading Styles Times Twenty," she lists ten principles for integrating reading into the classroom and children's lives. I have included this list in the background research section

and some ideas for encouraging reading in the classroom and at home in the related articles section of this study.

My third goal is somewhat selfish. I hope to be a children's book editor and author, and this project has given me a chance to see what children really love about reading—to gain valuable insights that should prove useful in my intended career. The photographs and children's own words stand as testimonies to their love of reading.

Colin age 7
Colin age 7



1-1. Colin peeks over his book to share some thoughts with one of his classmates.

Reading Styles

In an analysis of how children read, it is important to know what can prohibit or hinder children from enjoying reading. In her article, Marie Carbo lists ten principles for teachers and parents to keep in mind when trying to get children to read (38-42). Since some of the principles overlapped, I combined the ten to make four principles.

1. It is natural for children to enjoy reading.
2. Children need to be challenged with high-level material.
3. All children have their own styles of reading, which develop at different rates.
4. Children should understand their own styles and respect others' styles.

It is natural for children to enjoy reading.

According to Carbo, this principle is the one on which the other three are based (38). Carbo cannot prove that all children enjoy reading because it is impossible to measure reading enjoyment. For Carbo, this statement must be self-evident; it is the given in a geometric formula. If children did not enjoy reading, reading style would not matter. There would be right ways and wrong ways to read. If a child did not enjoy reading, parents and teachers could just say, "Johnny is not a reader." There would be no help for that situation.

But for Carbo, there is no such thing as "not a reader." When Carbo says it is "natural" for children to enjoy reading, she means that children enjoy reading like they enjoy playing or singing. However, humans can bury their nature if others deem it inappropriate or incorrect. With the Reading Styles model, children who do not enjoy reading have not found their style yet. If a child does not enjoy reading, there must be a cause. It would be a mistake to assume that this dislike for reading is inherent. In books, children learn about worlds different from and similar to their own. The book serves as a stimulus: visual, when there are pictures or illustrations; aural, when the children hear their

own voices or the voice of a teacher/parent say the words; and tactile, when children can feel the smooth pages and cover of a book with their fingers.

In a relaxed environment, one that is unstructured, children need to be able to read at least once a week (Carbo 38). There should be a wide variety of material available to supplement that reading, including books-on-tape, picture books, and puppets to allow children to act out scenes in a book. Teachers and parents should question children about their wants. Children are more likely to enjoy reading if they like the stories available. If a child does not seem to enjoy reading, it is probably because he/she needs to read differently.

Children need to be challenged with high-level material.

Children should always be encouraged to read in a more advanced manner. For instance, one of the first steps in the reading ladder is modeling (Carbo 38). Here, someone reads to the child. If modeling works correctly, eventually children will learn to repeat words after the parent or even memorize segments of a book. Then, children will learn to match sounds with letters. After modeling is accomplished, children need to be challenged to go beyond this achievement by reading alone. It would be detrimental to a child's reading level for a parent to stop the child from reading alone. Reading should be done in a series of steps. Once one step is accomplished, the child needs to move up to the next one.

All children have their own styles of reading, which develop at different rates.

Marie Carbo designed the prestigious Reading Styles Inventory (RSI) to help teachers identify each child's reading style. The survey has two parts: environment and mode. In the environment section, the child answers questions dealing with space, time, and noise. Typical questions would be:

1. Do you prefer to sit in something soft, like a couch, or something hard, like a desk?
2. Do you like to read in the morning?
3. Do you like to read with a friend?

Teachers can then use this information to design a reading corner in the classroom. In Mrs. Gluff's first grade classroom at Burris Laboratory School, there is a reading corner. Seating includes desks, rocking chairs, a couch, and even a stuffed dinosaur. The lighting can be adjusted according to what children request. There is also a tape player for audio books, a computer for CD-roms, and a stage for puppet shows. When the children have quiet during DEAR time (Drop Everything and Read), the children may use whatever is necessary for effective reading.

In the modes section of the RSI, students are asked to answer questions about the learning strategies that help them the best. Examples of questions include:

1. Do you like a teacher to look at your reading assignment?
2. Do you like to discuss your reading assignment?
3. Would repeating a phone number several times help you to remember it?
4. Would you like to act out a scene of a story to help you understand the assignment?

Teachers can use this section to figure out which students need what individualized help and what kind of activities should be done during reading time. One popular method of supplementing a book is to show a movie version. A movie can bring out the excitement of a book for certain students. However, some students are more excited if pictures come with the written word. Both are valid methods of turning a child on to reading.

Teachers must be careful not to label students as "slow" just because they have a different style of reading (Carbo 39). Such labels can be detrimental to a student's self-esteem. Knowing a child has a different style, of course, does not mean that teachers

should just accept that student's weaknesses. Teachers should show children how to work at improving their weak reading skills.

Children should understand their own styles and respect others' styles.

By understanding their own styles, children can learn what their strengths and weaknesses are as readers. The knowledge that different styles exist should also be used in classroom discussions. For instance, one of the questions in the RSI asks if the child prefers music while he/she reads. The teacher might mention to the class that of 20 students, 13 said they needed music to be able to concentrate. On the other hand, seven students are distracted by music. Students can then suggest ways of solving conflicts. In this situation, a good compromise would be to have the music listeners wear earphones. Such discussions would foster respect among the students for each other as readers.

Carbo's 10 principles and RSI combine to make both students and teachers aware that reading is an individual thing. There is not one standard for a "good" reader. Based on Carbo's article, I have made up a list of mistakes teachers/parents make that discourage children from reading. Teachers or parents can make unhappy readers in the following ways, which can ruin reading for children:

1. Forcing the child to read only from a standard list of books
2. Condemning books-on-tape as "lazy" reading
3. Segregating fast, regular, and slow readers
4. Teaching students that there is one way to read
5. Not allowing students reading time
6. Insisting that students sit at their desks during reading time

Because my project analyzes how ten first-grade students read, an understanding of style is necessary. Each of the students I interviewed had different preferences for environment, different interests in reading material, and different opinions on what was

most enjoyable about reading, whether it be words, pictures, or colors. While reading the interviews later in the thesis, keep in mind the existence of different reading styles. The children who only read one or two books a week or who prefer being read to by an adult are not necessarily "lazy" or "slow." Instead, see them as students who are drawn to different aspects of reading than the typical bookworm.

Assumptions

I was assigned to Mrs. Gluff's first-grade classroom at Burris Laboratory School. First, I took pictures of children reading during their free reading time. After development, I chose the best photos and asked for the names of the children in my pictures. I then developed a series of nine question, given at the end of the interviews section. Questions dealt with children's likes and dislikes about reading during free time. Through 15-minute interviews with each child chosen, I attempted to discover the following things:

What possible things had parents done to encourage reading?
Is environment a factor in children's reading enjoyment?
Do children who especially like to read always have family members who enjoy reading?

I made some assumptions before starting the interviews. Through the interviews with the children and the observations I made from the photos, I compared my assumptions to the reality for each child. The assumptions were:

The children like reading.
The children were read to at home.
They preferred comfortable seats to hard chairs.
By first grade, they enjoy reading by themselves more than with a parent.
Reading is encouraged at home.
The children who really enjoy reading also have siblings who enjoy reading; likewise, the children who do not read as much have siblings who are not avid readers.
The children enjoy imaginary stories (Dr. Seuss) more than realistic ones (science books).
The children need complete silence when they read.

I made these assumptions based on personal experiences from my own childhood preferences and from Carbo's concept of reading styles.

Part II

The Children

Morgan Age 7



1-2. Morgan enjoys reading books with vibrant pictures. Notice the detailed pictures on the cover of the book she is reading.

Morgan

Morgan thought for awhile but couldn't come up with a favorite type of book. In her words, she likes all books. She started reading at the age of four, before kindergarten. Before that, she learned to enjoy books from reading with her dad before bed. One of the things her dad did to make her learn to read was play a game. After they had read a book together a few times, her dad would read the book and say the words incorrectly. Morgan's favorite thing to do was correct her dad and his reading errors. This game made her pay attention to the words and the pictures.

Since she enjoys drawing pictures and making up stories, Morgan has even started creating her own books at home. She writes the stories first and then illustrates them. Sometimes she draws pictures for books that were already written by famous authors. Morgan said that sometimes she escapes into the world of the book. She said, "I imagine what it would be like if I was really there." After she stops reading, she draws the pictures in her mind.

Morgan enjoys being read to and reading by herself equally. Reading by herself makes her feel like an adult, but being read to is easier when there are difficult words she does not understand. The rest of her siblings sometimes read but not all the time.

Her favorite spots to read are her parents' room, the living room, her bedroom, or the secret tree she found outside. She only uses the tree when it is warm, of course. While reading, she needs complete silence or she cannot concentrate.

Morgan matches most of the assumptions. The exception, of course, is that her siblings do not seem to enjoy reading as much as Morgan, according to her. The problem with judging reading enjoyment by how much children read is that age matters. At Morgan's age, she does not have very much homework to do or many responsibilities to fulfill at home. Her older siblings might have more obligations or responsibilities. When children are Morgan's age, it is obvious they will have plenty of free time. The other

problem is that Morgan may not be the best monitor for how much her siblings read. If her opinion is true and the siblings do not enjoy reading very much, then that assumption is untrue in Morgan's case.

Morgan's visual mind can help her enjoy reading through her art. It is a wonderful idea for her to write stories based on art or art based on stories. Picture books should be used often. Sometimes adults want to stick to the written text. It helps to stop and ask questions about the pictures while reading: What is happening here? Why is the character doing that? Also, repetition seems to help Morgan, hence her dad reads each book several times. The game they invented together helped her to keep concentrating. One thing that might help Morgan is a large-print book. The large letters grab the eye and hold attention.

Sean doe



1-3. Sean likes to isolate himself while he is reading. At home, he even reads under his bed. At school, he reads in the back of the room.

Sean

Sean told me, with a serious face, that his favorite author, Dr. Seuss, had recently died. Because I had been unaware of this fact, we talked about Dr. Seuss briefly. Sean appreciates that Dr. Seuss likes the way words sound. He explained that if Dr. Seuss couldn't find the right word, he made up one that sounded right. One of his favorite Dr. Seuss books is Green Eggs and Ham. Sean also said that Dr. Seuss used pictures for his books that showed how kids would imagine the story.

Sean was an early reader. He began reading by himself in pre-school. Today, he guesses that he reads nine to ten books a week. If he finds a word he doesn't understand, Sean looks it up in the dictionary his parents bought him. When asked why he prefers reading by himself, Sean said, "Well, sometimes you just have to read on your own. You have got to learn sometime." Despite the fact that he has a large family, Sean believes his other siblings do not read very much. In fact, he says he reads the most in the family.

As far as environment goes, Sean reads under the bed in his room. For light, he uses a flashlight. He needs that privacy. Sometimes, he listens to music with his headphones.

He showed me the book Color Color. The book did not have much written text, but the colors told a story themselves. Besides standard illustrations, the book contained transparent sheets of color, like Reynolds Wrap or a camera filter. When these were held up to the pages, of course the pictures changed color. The pictures seemed to fascinate him. He kept prompting me for what the next picture would be and saying, "You've got to see this one!"

Sean seems to be a visual reader, based on the color book, although he also enjoys the written word, based on his admiration of Dr. Seuss. Sean's need for space when reading causes him to read under his bed, almost hidden from everyone, and with

earphones. He has also learned to use a dictionary so that he does not need anyone else while he reads. I also noticed that Sean had trouble ignoring my camera for his pictures. Most likely, he saw me as an intruder upon his reading space. Sean fulfilled all of the assumptions, except for the one about siblings. See the profile of Morgan for the problems with this assumption.

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1-4. Alex reads a colorfully decorated atlas. Alex's belief that the characters from the nursery rhyme, "Jack and Jill" are real people offers a testimony to the power of literature on children's minds.

Alex

Alex enjoys Dr. Seuss and his "nonsense words." What impressed Alex about Dr. Seuss is that he had written so many stories. Alex enjoys all of them. Since Mrs. Gluff's classroom has a lot of Dr. Seuss books, Alex usually grabs one of them for DEAR time.

Alex started reading by himself about eight months ago. The teacher and his parents decided to enroll him in a reading program for some extra work. The program gives students short books that they read and think about afterwards. After he does the work independently, he can ask for help if he needs it. Alex said it is hard for him to read because sometimes the words clump together.

One difference between Alex and other children who have difficulty reading is that he still prefers reading by himself, as most of his classmates do. Usually children who cannot concentrate need that extra voice to keep them on track, but Alex says that he needs quiet. The voice distracts him. However, Alex mentioned that he does like to have the TV on while he is reading. The TV keeps him from being distracted. The difference may be that one voice is directed at him, while the other voice is speaking to others. Whatever the case, Alex is a student with whom teachers should definitely use different strategies for the most effective reading experience.

Another thing that I enjoyed about the interview with Alex was our talk about "real or fiction?" When I asked him how he could tell which stories were true and which stories were invented, he said, "You can tell if a story is fake or real if you have heard of it. Like 'Jack and Jill,' that's real. People talk about Jack and Jill all the time." Alex's assurance gave a strong testimony for the power of stories on youth. Children hear the story of Jack and Jill so much that those characters gain almost godlike status. Over and over, since the nursery rhyme was invented, Jack and Jill have been falling down repeatedly in the minds of children.

Alex enjoys reading most in his room where there is peace and quiet. His brother reads a lot. Although they share a room, Alex can still read with concentration since his brother is also a quiet reader. Sometimes, he likes to eat and drink while reading. The best thing about books, according to Alex, is that "You get to learn things about new people." That statement sounds strangely like Joan Thron, who said, "We are drawn to books because we know that in the best ones we will find others like and unlike ourselves" (340). It is this motivation to learn about new people that has kept Alex reading, even though he has difficulties concentrating.

With children who see words as clumped together, like Alex did, Marie Carbo suggests that teachers use color overlays (39). Adding color borders or color around the letters adds depth to the words. Obviously, what Alex enjoys best about reading are the stories themselves. Reading aloud or reading alone with discussion afterwards would both be good ideas. Alex fulfills all the assumptions of my typical child reader. He seems willing to try to improve his weaknesses. That is all a teacher can expect from any child. One thing to especially avoid is emphasizing weaknesses. Alex knows he does not read as quickly as other children. At this critical point, if teachers can keep him enjoying reading, he will not give up.

Johanna

age 8



1-5. Johanna, with her curious mind, prefers reading science books over the picture books and stories that children are traditionally known to enjoy.

Johanna

Johanna proved to be a unique case. When I first asked her what kind of books she preferred, she automatically said science books. Science books are definitely academic. They are not the type of books children usually read for pleasure. The book she picked to show me was also a non-fiction work. Johanna has a curious mind that wants to know how things work.

She is a new reader and started reading alone only this year. Perhaps with her science-oriented mind, she preferred to observe the outside world rather than to read books indoors. Johanna estimates reading about five books a week. Now that she can read alone, she prefers this type of reading to being read to by an adult. When asked why, she replied, "Because you are actually doing something on your own."

Before she learned to read alone, she was read to by her dad. Besides reading books, Johanna's dad challenged her reading skills by giving her small tests. He asked a lot of questions about the pictures, which might explain the fact that she has not been reading by herself for very long. Attention was focused on the pictures and not on the text. Her siblings both read a lot, which is something that usually influences children to read more than usual.

For environment, Johanna reads in her room next to her goldfish. She enjoys listening to music as she reads.

The book she chose to show me was called I Spy. The book was basically a game. The text identified objects that could be found in the pictures. For instance, one clue was "eight bears." Readers are supposed to read the words and then try to find the objects in the photos. The illustrations were color photos of arrangements of different objects. One page had a series of colored blocks stacked into structures with small objects interspersed within the towers. This kind of book works for an active mind like Johanna's. The

pictures give clues to what the text says. If a child sees the word "bear" and is having trouble reading that word, he/she is helped when he/she sees a bear in the picture.

For Johanna, I would suggest using her love of science to supplement stories. For instance, if a book has lots of trees in it, suggest that she collect leaves or color pictures of leaves in different seasons. Refer to the pictures often and allow her to notice the details within them.

Johanna matches all of my assumptions except for her reading preferences. Obviously she enjoys reading books that reveal the real world more than fictional stories. In this case, the first thing to change would be some of the reading material. Naturally, she must learn to read all kinds of books and not just her preferences. However, a change of emphasis to the scientific aspects of the book would certainly be positive. For instance, after reading Eric Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar, a teacher or parent could mention some things about caterpillars and how they live.

Derek

Age 7



1-6. Derek says that his favorite books are the Hardy Boys mysteries. Derek was the only child who did not care if his chair was soft or not, as long as he had his own reading space.

Derek

Derek already prefers adolescent literature for his reading material. He told me that his favorite books are the Hardy Boys series. He even watches the TV series, based on the books, that is currently running. Derek likes to read these mystery stories because they allow him to try to figure out "whodunit" before the Hardy Boys. He enjoys watching the boys "get smart" to the guilty person or secret.

One thing I noticed about Derek, as I was interviewing him, was that he took a long time to answer the questions. I could see him thinking, weighing each word, in his head. He was a very serious boy who wanted to give honest answers to the questions being asked. It was this mature quality that made me understand why he would like the Hardy Boys stories so early.

He started reading before school started at age five. These days, he reads about 4 books a week. His nine-year old brother reads even more—about eight books a week. At home, the person who reads to him is his mother. Before he learned to read by himself, she read him stories, and they both made voices for the characters, such as wolves or witches. Despite these fun times, today Derek says he prefers reading by himself. His explanation puzzled me. He said, "When you read by yourself, you don't have to listen." When further questioned, he said he meant that when his mom read to him, he couldn't hear the words inside his head very clearly.

Another thing Derek said about reading was that he sometimes escapes into his book world and forgets the present. There have been times when his mother had called for him, and he couldn't hear her voice. When she finally came upstairs to demand that he answer her, he did not understand why she was so upset. This kind of involvement in books is typical of a child of Derek's reading maturity.

He reads in his bedroom with a dim light. The picture I selected to represent Derek does not show this fact, but the first time I was taking pictures, Derek had one of the more

interesting reading positions I saw. He sat and read his book at the computer. He did not look at the computer but sat in the hard chair and read. Most of his classmates sat on the floor with comfy pillows. Derek said that in this place, he didn't have to look at the other children. They would not distract him if he was in front of the computer.

Derek did not match a couple of my assumptions. First, Derek is the first child I talked to that mentioned preferring a hard chair to a comfortable cushion or pillow. It might be that seating is inconsequential to Derek or that hard chairs help keep him awake. Whatever the case, it was obviously more important to Derek that he have his space than to be comfortable. Second, the type of book Derek read was inconsistent with my assumptions. Even though the Hardy Boys stories are fictional in nature, the mystery is a genre that relates more to truth than to fiction. The characters are usually somewhat realistic and the situations described could easily happen.

I would give Derek as much reading independence as possible. His ability to surrender to the text and to ignore environment gives him a solid basis to read without control from an authority figure. As Derek gets more independent, discussion about the text and themes might even be possible at this stage.

Carly age 6



1-7. Carly wears a Winnie the Pooh shirt to show who her favorite book character is. When she reads books out loud with her father, they use voices for the different characters.

Carly

Carly's favorite books are the Winnie the Pooh series. She especially enjoys the story where Pooh gets stuck in the window of rabbit's house. The other animals try to push or pull Pooh out of the hole. Winnie the Pooh stories were written by A.A. Milne. However, now Disney adapts various stories for books, movies, or toys. Carly has a Pooh story on tape that comes with a follow-along booklet. She remembers that the Groundhog says, "Turn the page, turn the page!" to inform kids that a page turn is necessary.

Carly guesses that she started reading by herself when she was five years old. Before she read by herself, she remembers her dad sitting down with her to read a book together. To increase enjoyment of reading, Carly and her father started using "voices" when reading. She says her best voice is her "serious boy" voice. When I asked her what kind of voice that was, she said, "It's when you get mad and say, 'No, I mean it.'" Carly did not want to show me her "serious boy" voice.

She has one sister who is ten years old. Her sister does not like to read very much. Carly explained that her sister had too much homework so she did not have time to read. Before her sister had so much homework, she was an avid reader.

Carly guesses she reads about six books a week. When I asked her if she went to the library a lot, she said no. When questioned further, however, she said that she really did go to the library but did not have her own card. I asked her what was in the library and she said there was a hopscotch game that was a lot of fun.

When she reads now, she prefers to read by herself. Carly said that reading by herself was "good reading." She explained that she would become a better reader if she read by herself. Carly prefers to have no distracting noises, such as music or TV, playing while she is reading. When Carly reads, she sometimes forgets what time it is.

Her favorite reading spot is on the new furniture in the living room. She said that she always reads where there is a lot of light because "It is really bad for your eyes when you read in the dark."

Carly seemed to be a lot like myself when I was younger. Her answers in the interview seemed to agree with all the assumptions I made. Reading was encouraged by the books she and her father had read together. Her sister used to read a lot--something Carly probably noticed as a child. Carly's favorite books are obviously the make-believe stories that I indicated on the assumptions. During the interview, she pulled out the book The Enormous Crocodile by Roald Dahl. The main characters were animals. The crocodile was trying to eat a child for lunch but, instead, gets thrown into the sun by a protective elephant.

Carly is the typical independent reader who has a vivid imagination. She talked about her "book world" that she enters into when reading. For Carly I would suggest just letting her read as many books as possible. Then, allow her to use her imagination by drawing pictures of scenes missing from the picture books.

Kiley age 8



1-8. Kiley shows his action-oriented reading style in his movements. Kiley reads better when he can move and interact with others.

Kiley

I could tell right away that Kiley was a kinesthetic or action-oriented person. Kiley learns better when he can move and take part, instead of passively reading or listening. He told me right off, with no embarrassment, that he only reads about one book a week. In fact, he was surprised I had chosen him as one of those to interview.

He enjoys two types of stories best: animal stories and army stories. Again, action is emphasized. The army stories he described had many pictures. When questioned about how he got interested in those books, he couldn't remember. Since most of the other children said they read about five books a week, I asked him what he preferred to do during free time. As I had guessed already, he named building with Legos as his favorite pastime.

His 11-year old sister reads a lot of magazines but not very many books. As most kinesthetic learners do, he prefers to be read to over reading to himself. When his mom reads to him, it does not take as long. He also feels he understands the words better this way.

His reading spot is on the couch with a bright light. He watches TV a lot and often reads while the TV is turned on to a low volume. The sound helps him to concentrate.

When I asked him to choose a book off the shelf to show me, he chose one about the planets. The words were simple, telling about the solar system and the arrangements of the planets. The pictures were photographs taken by astronauts. I asked him if he preferred this book to a Dr. Seuss book which usually contains exaggerated illustrations and nonsense words. He again said yes. To him, it was more interesting to see something real than something invented.

Obviously, Kiley does not fit many of my assumptions, which is exactly why I did choose him as one of the students to interview. Just as I stated at the beginning, reading activities should be specialized for each individual.

Kiley does enjoy reading but not in the same way that a visual student does. He still prefers to be read to over reading by himself. Kiley may be one of those students who Carbo describes: "For some students, words may swirl and fall off the page (39)." The added emphasis of having someone speak the words while Kiley reads to himself keeps those words on the page.

Whether Kiley does not read as many books as the other children in the class because his sister does not read very often remains to be seen. But it is possible that he grew up seeing her choose magazine reading over books. Watching others in the house can certainly influence a child's perceptions of which reading is worthwhile.

Most interesting of all was Kiley's preference for realistic books over make believe stories. As a child, I always preferred the books with bright pictures and funny words. Besides the planet books, remember that Kiley also named books about the armed forces. His preference to know about the real world indicates an empirical mind combined with his action-oriented way of learning.

Kiley is definitely a child with whom a teacher would want to use different reading approaches. For instance, reading games or tracing letters with a finger are known techniques. Burris Laboratory School seems like a flexible environment that would work for a child like Kiley. In my younger years, he would have been labelled "slow." Hopefully, teachers are realizing the need to adapt tried-and-true reading methods for each child.

John age 6¹



1-9. John (left) reads better with a partner because he gets distracted if he is alone.

John

John seemed to like the nursery rhyme or childhood fable best. He mentioned "The Little Red Hen," "The Hungry Fox," and "The Three Little Pigs" as favorite reads. I wanted to include John in this report because he seemed like the typical "non-reader." Notice I did not say "slow" reader. John did not seem slow to me at all. More than anything, he seemed bored with reading; he was certainly capable. Of all the children interviewed, he seemed the least interested in my project. He kept asking me to repeat questions--possibly because he was not listening. According to the Carbo's Reading Styles Inventory, John does not enjoy reading because he has not found his own style yet or because someone told him that his style was incorrect. There was more evidence of this possibility during the interview.

He reads about one book a week by himself. He admitted, "I don't read much." If he reads with someone, it is either his mom, dad, or 15-year old cousin. When I asked him what they read together, he did not seem to remember or be interested in remembering. Perhaps reading time was not enjoyable for him or his parents just made it mandatory. In fact, his four-year old brother spends most of his free time on the computer instead of reading, indicating that this apathy to reading may run in the family. Reading usually makes John tired and puts him to sleep. He reads on the couch or in his mom's room.

The most revealing information came out during the "pick a book" part of the interview. First of all, rather than choose a story book, as most of the other students had done, John chose a reader--something he has to read for school. His selection showed me his emphasis on school reading. This would explain the stories he mentioned to me at the beginning of the interview. I checked afterwards, and all of the childhood stories mentioned were included in the readers. Those are the only stories he knows about. He does not see reading as a fun activity. If he reads, it is because an assignment has been given. As usual, I asked the students not to read, but to summarize what was happening

throughout the story. I said this statement several times to John. He continued to read me the words on the page. He seemed unwilling or incapable of making the jump from receiving information to using the information from the text. All he could do was read the words and regurgitate them to me.

I came out of this interview at a loss for suggestions to increase John's reading enjoyment. First of all, as a teacher, I would not attempt to ostracize John from his other classmates and target him as a "problem" reader. Instead, I would introduce him to different ways he could make reading more interesting without being dogmatic. For instance, drawing artwork for the stories would encourage him to use his imagination, which seemed asleep during the interview. Another thing I would ask him to try would be to create his own story. If he is bored with reading, maybe he needs a challenge. His reading preferences and thoughts on reading would be considered.

Brock age 6



1-10. Brock prefers non-fiction books. He proved it by reading a Charlie Brown book that teaches children about planes and airport terminals.

Brock

Once again, I found a child who preferred realistic, non-fiction reading over fantasy books. When I asked Brock about his reading preferences, the first thing that popped out of his mouth was "dinosaur books." The books he described to me were not made-up stories like Michael Foreman's Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish. He seemed to prefer scientific books that described how dinosaurs really lived in the Prehistoric Era. Brock said he liked to read about the dinosaurs' speeds, sizes, and the foods they enjoyed. In the books that Brock reads, the scientifically accurate actions of dinosaurs are described; in fantasy stories, the author will try to give the dinosaurs thoughts and feelings.

Brock also mentioned that he liked to read books based on the movie Star Wars. When I asked what he liked best about such books, he said he liked to learn about the ships and equipment that the Jedi Knights and different beings carried and steered. The Star Wars series is a fantasy story, but I found it significant that Brock did not care so much about the story as the weaponry used. It would be like learning about guns used in the Civil War. The movie became so important to this generation that a whole world was created for the characters, including holidays, habitats, cultures, and behaviors. Many of the fans consider it another world, just as real as our own. Brock, in a way, is simply learning about a different culture.

He has been reading by himself since the fourth week of first grade. I found it amazing that he knew exactly when he had learned to read by himself. Like most of his classmates, he prefers reading by himself rather than reading with a parent. If a book is too difficult for him to read, he asks his mom to read it to him. His thirteen-year old sister reads often, which may have influenced him to read.

For a reading environment, he enjoys sitting in his room because it is quiet. Sometimes, he listens to music. The lighting is bright to help him see better.

When I asked Brock to show me a book, he had a hard time selecting one from the class bookshelves. There are not many realistic books in the first-grade reading corner. He finally chose a book from the Peanuts series by Charles Schultz. I had to laugh when I saw that the book he chose was about airplanes, the Red Baron, and weaponry. In the comic strip, Snoopy is known to pretend he is the World War I Flying Ace battling the Red Baron, an actual German plane pilot. Again, Brock is learning about real events and people, even though the book is based on a comic strip. The book had a lot of intertextuality because it encourages children to combine their outside experiences with the pictures and words to create the total text (See example below). This book contained written text, balloon dialogue for the characters, diagrams, and signs hanging in airport lobbies and schools. Brock said he did not read all the words. He read the written text and the diagrams, which indicated that Brock found it more important to know about the intricacies of avial technology than to discover how the author describes thoughts of the characters. The main diagram had the parts of the plane labeled on a chalk board.

An interesting thing that happened was that Brock invented parts of the story while he was describing the book to me. I ask the children not to read the book aloud but to describe, in their own words, what is happening. In this manner, I gain a better insight into what the children see about the book. In one picture, there is an airplane. Brock mentioned that the people inside were wearing space suits. Space suits were not mentioned or pictured anywhere in the book. The space suits were an invention on Brock's part.

He also invented feelings for the characters. The Peanuts characters usually reveal feeling by dialogue and facial expression. One of the characters who does neither is Woodstock, Snoopy's bird friend. I was amused by the number of times Brock told me what Woodstock was feeling. For instance, in one illustration, Snoopy drives away on the plane. Woodstock is hopping behind the plane. Brock said that Woodstock was really annoyed at Snoopy. Woodstock did not look annoyed. His facial expression was blank, as

usual. Here was a good example of intertextuality. An example of the process that went through Brock's mind might be:

1. Brock remembers a time when one of his friends left him behind.
2. He remembers that he was annoyed by his friend's actions.
3. He sees that Woodstock has a similar experience in this book.
4. Brock projects his feelings from his own experience onto Woodstock, assuming that since he was annoyed, Woodstock must be, also.

Brock's inventive mind allows him to enjoy books in a different way than some children. Therefore, I would suggest that if Brock so desired, he read stories dealing with real events, such as wars or other historical events. Brock would be more interested in reading about the colonization of America than in reading stories about Pooh Bear. A good group of books for him would be Mitsumaso Anno's group of wordless picture books. Of course, he should read books with written text included, also. But to satisfy his interest in history, these books would teach him new things. There is Anno's America, Great Britain, and Europe. The books have page after page of pictures. The format is almost a Where's Waldo? book. The reader must examine the pages closely to find the events being described. The book dealing with America has a structure of Atlantic Ocean to Pacific Ocean. The pictures move westward, telling the story of America's growth while showing famous people, places, and events. Reading material would make a big difference to Brock.

Jacqueline ade7



1-11. When sharing a book, Jackie often verbally inserts dialogue that is not included in the text.

Jackie

One of the reasons I chose Jackie as one of my subjects was her reading position. Although not shown in the accompanying photo, when I took the first set of photos in the class, she was basically hiding in a corner. In the corner of the room, there is a big storage closet that is almost touching the wall. She read in the enclosed space between the closet and the wall. Her need for total isolation interested me. I guessed from these actions that Jackie would be easily distracted and needed to be focused. During our interview, I was proved correct. Because of the timing of the interviews, they had to be done during class time. Jackie kept getting distracted during her interview whenever there was a pause. She needs isolation yet there must be sound. Even though she was isolated in her corner, she was still close enough to her classmates to hear sounds. She wanted to know what her classmates were doing. In the picture shown, Jackie is reading near a group of friends. During this second photo shoot, it was extremely difficult for me to catch Jackie reading because she was not reading. Since she was too close to her friends, she kept being distracted from reading.

When asked about her favorite books, she mentioned the book Stormy Weather, based on the Rugrats TV series. She likes this book because of its humor. She enjoys books that make her laugh, which explains her other favorite books, Dr. Seuss books. Jackie said she enjoyed the poems written by Dr. Seuss. I thought it was interesting that she said "poems." Jackie realized that the words rhymed and, therefore, assumed the book must be full of poems. She enjoys the way words sound. I determined by this, and her choice of book later, that Jackie enjoys the aural aspects of reading best.

Jackie guesses that she reads two or three books a week. She enjoys reading by herself best because "It takes longer so that I have time to really understand it." The only books she likes to have someone read to her are books she has to read for school assignments. In other words, Jackie will only put forth the effort to understand what she

reads when she is allowed to pick the book. If someone gives an order or assignment to read, she is somewhat passive. She enjoys reading best in her mother's bedroom. The bed is more comfortable than the one in her room because her mom has more pillows. Jackie likes to read with the TV on. She said, "I don't look at the screen; the sound just keeps me focused on the book." This philosophy may not make much sense to someone who needs complete silence, but if a child like Jackie does not have a sound to attract her attention, her mind will wander away from the task at hand.

Jackie chose to read a story from one of her reading books. A chick who runs away from its mother is captured by a fox. To avoid being eaten, the chick promises the fox three wishes if it will not eat him. The chick has no magical powers but runs away after the third wish. Jackie made several additions to the text. As mentioned before, I believe Jackie is an aural reader. What she added was textual in nature. Where only a picture existed, Jackie told me what a character was saying. Inside her head, Jackie could hear dialogue going on even when it was not provided by the author.

It is obvious, then, that Jackie is interested in sounds. First, when she was doing quiet reading, she did so in an isolated spot yet it was close enough to hear the conversations of her classmates. Second, when reading a Dr. Seuss book, Jackie placed special emphasis on the rhymes in the books. Lastly, if she is doing silent reading at home, she likes the television on to keep her focused. I would suggest Jackie use books on tape or music on a headset during reading times.

Part III

Conclusions

Conclusion

In looking back at the interviews, I wanted to know how many of my assumptions seemed true for these children and which needed to be changed. I have listed the number of children who seemed to agree and disagree with each assumption, indicating the results of the interviews. In the last column, I indicate the percentage of children who confirmed each assumption. Remember, there were ten first-grade children interviewed. When I say "the children" I mean the specific children I interviewed. The assumptions were:

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Assumption %</u>
The children like reading.	10	0	100%.
The children are read to at home.	10	0	100%
The children preferred comfortable seating to hard chairs.	9	1	90%
By first grade, they enjoy reading by themselves more than with a parent.	8	2	80%
Reading is encouraged at home.	10	0	100%
The children who really enjoy reading also have siblings at home who enjoy reading; likewise, the children who do not enjoy reading as much have siblings who are not avid readers.	6	0	100%
The children enjoy imaginary stories more than realistic ones.	6	4	60%
The children need complete silence when they read.	5	5	50%

Based on the information collected from the interviews, then, it is obvious that these children do enjoy reading. As they are becoming more aware of the world they live

kevin age 7



1-12. Kevin reads an old favorite, Dr. Seuss, on one of the many body-size pillows Mrs. Gluff selected for the reading corner in the first-grade classroom.

in, children are naturally curious and interested in learning new words, ideas, and information. The information about seating preferences shows that most children in this class enjoyed sitting in comfortable, cushioned chairs. Children feel more relaxed and open when they are comfortable. A hard chair may seem too much like a classroom, where they are passive receivers of information, rather than active participants in creating new knowledge.

Before discussing the findings from the interviews, it is interesting to call attention to two questions that did not get much reaction from any student. They were:

Are you in any book clubs or summer reading programs?

Do you feel like you are somewhere else when you read a book?

First, none of the students interviewed said they had ever been in a summer reading program. I was surprised at this information because when I was a child, I was in the summer reading club yearly. Participants had to read books and then give brief summaries to their parents. Parents would then initial the space next to the list of books described to them. After reading fifteen books, children received a free pizza. After that, the point was to read as many books as possible. That none of these children I interviewed have participated in summer reading programs is not especially traumatic, but it is interesting. Perhaps Muncie does not have summer reading clubs at their libraries; however, they should. The reading club not only influences children to read books, but it also teaches them to formulate ideas about books. Parents have to be convinced that children have read a book to initial it. Children in the program learn the concept of theme when they have to describe the point of the story.

Second, I asked the children interviewed if they felt as if they were somewhere else when they read books. Most of the children gave me blank stares or raised eyebrows, indicating that they do not forget about time when they read a book. On the other hand, it is possible that some of the children interviewed do lose track of their surroundings but cannot match their experiences with my description. Children may just call this book travel

"make believe." Perhaps these children are too young of readers to have experienced escape into the world of fantasy yet. It may not be until high school that these children startle to hear a bell ringing, interrupting their reading of a wonderful book. I called attention to these two unanswered questions because we can learn as much from questions the children ignored as from questions the children answered without hesitation.

While most of the children interviewed did prefer reading by themselves, it is also true that two of the children still prefer to read with someone. As age increases, reading becomes more of a solitary activity, but some first-grade children have not made that transition yet. A teacher could use this information to realize that a group reading, where the teacher reads out loud to the whole class, could be beneficial to those who prefer to read in groups and enjoyable even to those who prefer to read alone.

Several of the assumptions made dealt with the family, whether it be parents or siblings. Based on the information given during the interviews, it is obvious that home environment matters in molding a child's attitudes about reading. In most cases, the children who enjoyed reading also had siblings who enjoyed reading. Likewise, the children who did not seem to enjoy reading had siblings who felt the same way. It is also apparent that the parents of these children are dedicated to providing an environment where reading is possible, since all ten children were read to at home and were encouraged to read.

My last two assumptions, the children enjoy imaginary stories more than realistic ones and the children need complete silence to read, were not consistent with the information I received in some of the children's interviews. Therefore, it is in these two areas that I have learned the most. For one thing, four out of the ten students did not prefer imaginary stories to realistic ones. Some of these four students preferred books such as science books, mystery books, or astronomy books. When I took my children's literature course at Westminster, the teacher only showed books with fictional stories. There was no examination of picture books about insects, planets, or real events. Based on

the information I received from the children, I know that these books can be used to stimulate student interests in academic pursuits. Because I plan to write some children's stories, I could write some non-fiction books for children as well as picture books.

My last assumption was that children need complete silence to be able to read with understanding. I based this statement on personal experience of how I read. Some of the children interviewed enjoyed or even needed music to help them concentrate. This information could be used by teachers in deciding what equipment to have available in the classroom. Headphones or a small radio could be used. However, half of the students did require silence so headphones would be a good choice to accommodate all students.

I would make two recommendations to Mrs. Gluff for future classes. First, I would suggest that Mrs. Gluff purchase more non-fiction books for her reading corner. Most of the books in the room had cartoon pictures and made-up stories. I suggest she buy some books describing nature, the universe, planes, or anything else the students seem to be interested in. In this case, I would ask each student for his/her hobbies or interests.

Second of all, I would definitely purchase some headphones and tapes for the students to listen to during DEAR time. When I took pictures during their reading time, I noticed many of the children could not concentrate because of too many outside noises. Maybe headphones could focus certain students to the task at hand. The students probably know if they need silence or not. Headphones would be a wise purchase and could be used for several activities in other areas of the classroom.

Interviewing these children was a challenging task but also an enjoyable one. It was encouraging as a hopeful book author to see so many children excited about reading. Their enthusiasm may have been existent since birth. More likely, the excitement comes from a combination of youth and parental encouragement. At this age, children have the capacity to get excited about many different activities. It would be interesting to see how the children reacted to similar questions at an older age, such as third grade or even older.

As a writing tutor at Ball State University, I get to see first-hand how many college students complain about reading. As adolescence and adulthood veil the children we once were, reading becomes synonymous with assignments, taking notes, and writing essays. Many adults are too busy with work and responsibilities to sit down and read for the pure enjoyment of it. In a couple of years, the symptoms of this "reading cynicism" may become apparent in the same children I interviewed who were so excited about reading. What is it that happens to children that makes reading less enjoyable or even boring? Can it be stopped in any way? Mary Ellen Van Camp, an Associate Professor of Children's Literature at Ball State University said, "It may be that if a child continues to see Mom and Dad reading, the child will continue to be an avid book reader. If he/she asks a question and Mom says, 'I really have to read this right now,' the child may understand that reading is important even to adults." A follow-up study on each of the children interviewed in this thesis and a search for symptoms that make reading less enjoyable to teenagers and adults would be suggestions for further study.

In conclusion, analyzing children's reading styles and preferences is important in discovering how to open up the world of reading to children. When I made assumptions before I interviewed the children, I assumed that these children would have the same attitudes as I had. Some teachers and parents may assume likewise. After talking to the children and reading Carbo's theories, however, I realized that every case is different. However, one thing remained consistent. The children did like to read when their needs were met. It just takes a little time to find out what those needs are for each child. In the end, however, that little bit of time can make the difference between a child who tolerates reading and a child who is freed by reading.

Questions Asked in Student Interviews

1. What do you like to read in your free time? Give some examples.
2. When did you start to read by yourself?
3. About how many books do you read a week?
4. Are you in any book clubs or summer reading programs?
5. Do you prefer to be read to or to read something by yourself?
6. When you read a book, what happens? Do you feel like you are somewhere else? Can you hear what's going on around you?
7. Do your brothers and sisters read a lot?
8. Where do you usually read?
9. Do you do other activities while reading?
10. Have them show a favorite book.

Part IV

Related Articles

United States Trade in Books, AAP Estimates from 1980-1996

*Does not include book clubs or mail order

Figures are in Millions of dollars

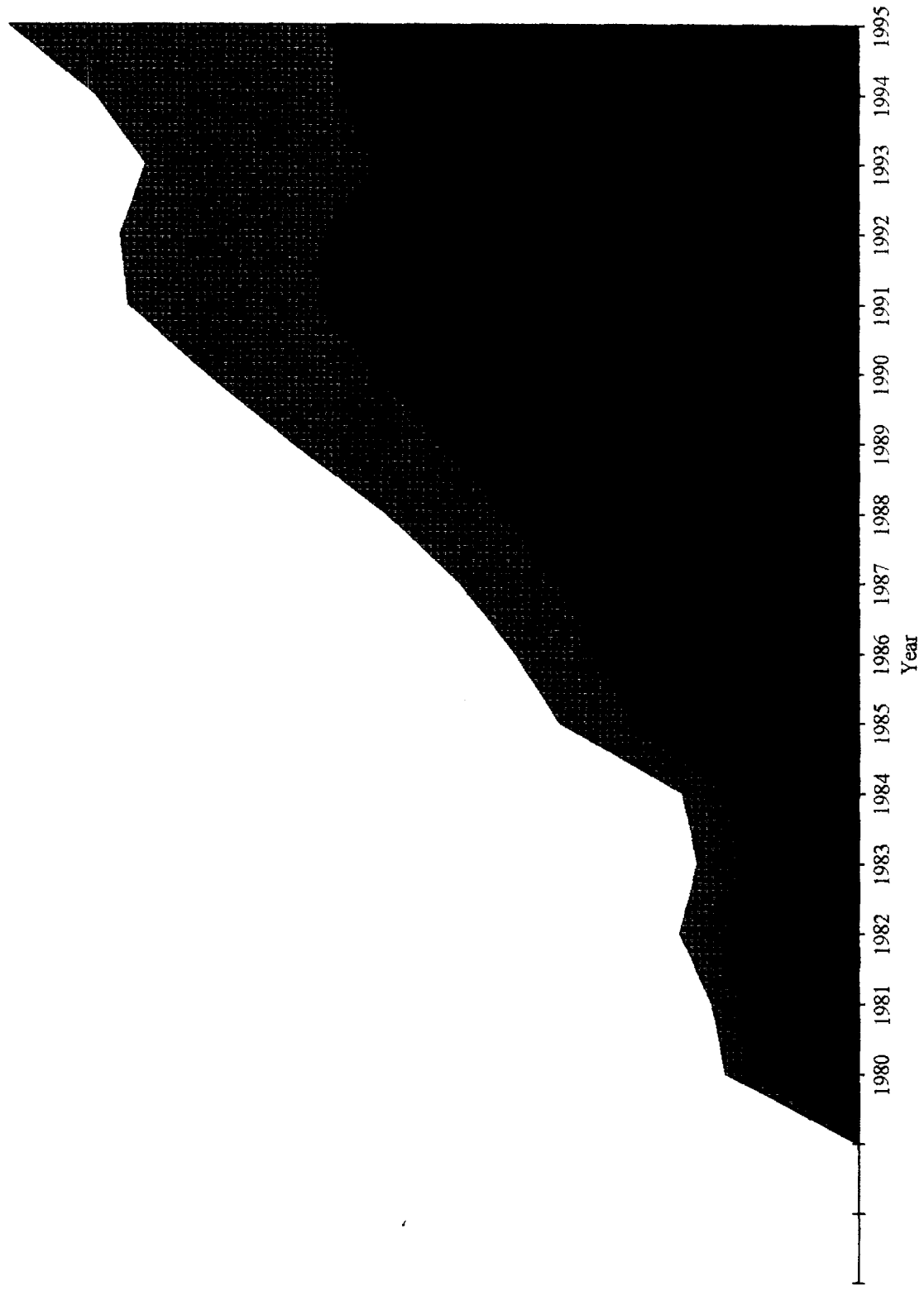
	Juvenile Hard	Juvenile Paper
1980	168.5	42.3
1981	190.2	43.2
1982	206.9	77.1
1983	190.3	65.7
1984	208.2	72.1
1985	358.7	116.9
1986	415.0	131.4
1987	478.5	156.6
1988	558.4	192.8
1989	665.1	236.4
1990	768.9	269.6
1991	859.0	304.8
1992	850.8	326.6
1993	767.4	368.7
1994	823.4	393.0
1995	843.2	509.3

As you can see from the number chart and area chart, the sale of children's books, as recorded in Bowker's Annual, years 1982-1995, has steadily grown until recently. Between the years of 1992 and 1995, there was a CGR (compound growth rate) of -0.3 %. In contrast, the CGR records in the preceding years grew quickly, reaching a climax between the years 1982 and 1985, when it was 20.4 %. While the sale of children's books is still larger than it was during these years, the growth rate is starting to decrease and remain stagnant. In the most recent edition, the 1996 edition, the compound growth rate of juvenile literature finally reached the positive side again, a mere 1.7 %, between the years 1992 and 1996. In the July 21, 1997 edition of Publisher's Weekly, the editors named the past year a May Massacre for juvenile literature, as children's book sales dropped to -44.9% ("May" 107). The figure described the fiscal year 1997 only up until July. Since sales have dropped from the 1980s, it is obvious that growth of the children's book industry is not happening.

United States Trade in Books

AAP Estimates from 1980-1996

Millions of \$



The growth rate is important because book prices continue to rise every year, due to inflation. In the second chart in this section, the average price of children's books is given for the years 1980 to 1995. Besides a sharp climax in 1991 and some small changes, the average price of children's books has risen smoothly. In contrast, the chart and graph describing children's book sales in the past 16 years is full of ups and downs, indicating that the growth rate of book sales has not been as smooth as book prices. When the growth rate begins to dwindle, it is assumed that children, or more likely, the parents of children, are spending their money on different things. The need to motivate children to read is greater than ever. Quality children's books are a necessity if children's books are to continue to be valued by the public.

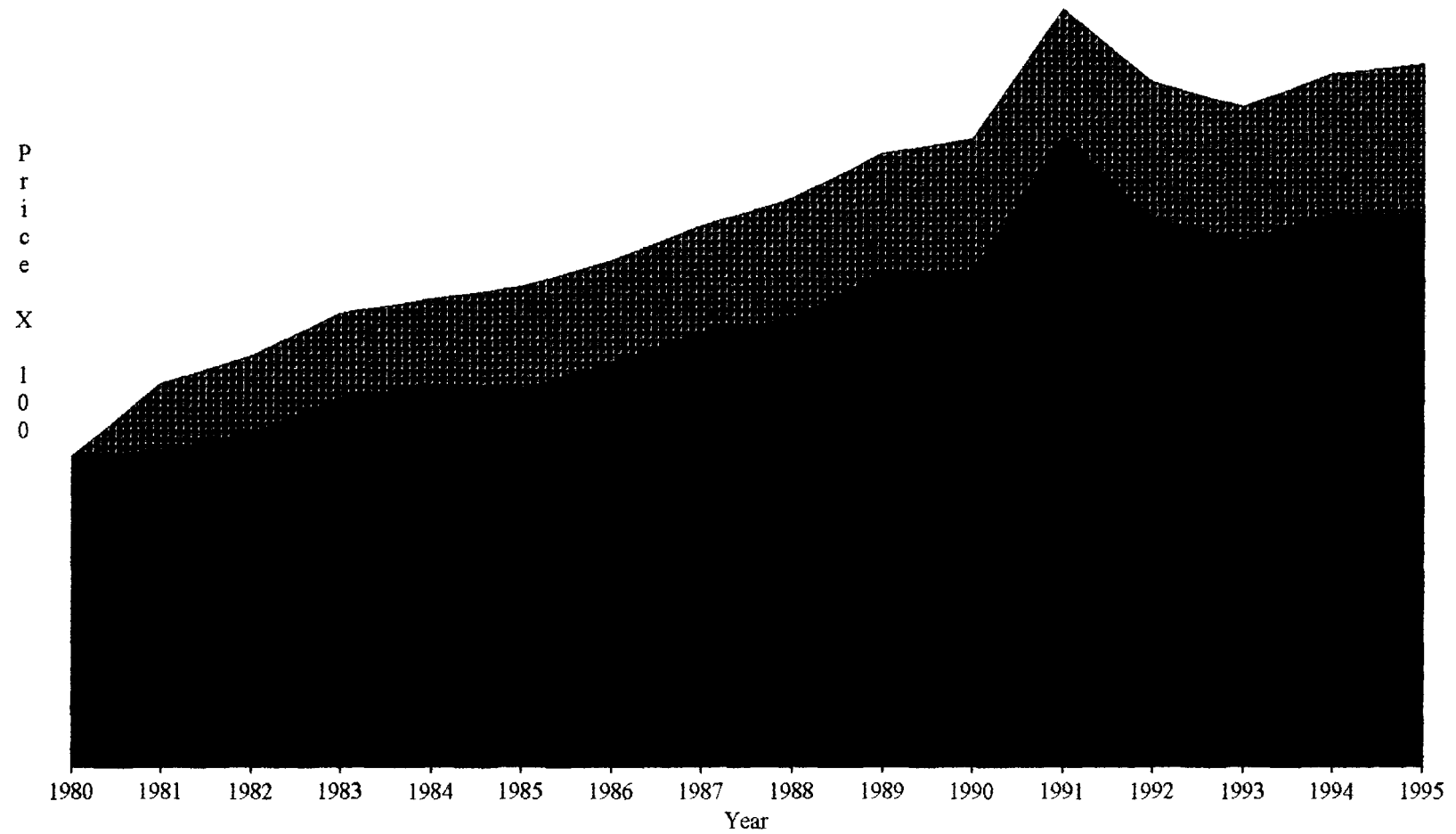
Hardcover and Paperback Books, Average Prices for United States, 1980-1995

prices are in dollars (\$)

	Juvenile Hard	Juvenile Paper
1980	8.16	figure unavailable
1981	8.31	1.79
1982	8.78	2.05
1983	9.73	2.24
1984	10.02	2.31
1985	9.95	2.71
1986	10.64	2.71
1987	11.48	2.80
1988	11.79	3.18
1989	13.01	3.19
1990	13.01	3.56
1991	16.64	3.38
1992	14.46	3.61
1993	13.87	3.54
1994	14.59	3.71
1995	14.55	3.99

Hardcover and Paperback Books

Average Prices, 1980-1995



Ideas for Increasing Reading Enjoyment

As I was researching other case studies of young readers, I came across many suggestions for making reading more enjoyable for young children. I decided to collect some of these, and some of my own ideas, together as a manual.

Parents should actively read to their children at home.

Most of the research dealing with the benefits of reading aloud to children is based on the famous Haringey study that lasted two years (Hayden 334). In the article by Tizard et al., researchers in the Haringey study discovered that the children who improved were the ones receiving extra practice at home.

However, a recent article by Ruth Hayden also suggested that some students don't improve by this method "unless parents have received some training in specific areas to assist their children during reading sessions" (334). The main thing parents should remember when reading with their child is that it's not necessarily enough just to force him/her to read. Reading must be supplemented by interaction with the text. Reading works in the same way that hearing does. Just because someone hears a statement doesn't mean he/she understands what is being said, even if the listener is concentrating.

One suggestion for a possible interaction with the text would be to have a discussion. After a book is read or even during the reading, parents could ask questions about the point of the book or the motivations of the characters. When I read a book with my four-year old nephew, I often ask him questions: Why is he trying to catch the mouse? Is that someone you would want for a friend? Have you ever done anything like that before? His answers are often enlightening and surprising. If I do not encourage this interaction, he often gets bored and leaves my lap before the story is finished.

Choose books children feel involved in.

If parents chose appropriate books for children, many of the difficulties would be erased. Of course, not all children enjoy the same books, but some books are more likely than others to be favorites with children. I think the best books, especially for children ages three to five, are the kind they can actively participate in. The Jolly Pocket Postman by Janet and Allan Ahlberg is an excellent choice. The story revolves around a postman who delivers letters to fairy tale characters. The letters are humorous and reflect the present world. Although there is a written text, there are also actual letters that children can open and read. These letters make the children not only readers, but characters in the text. This leads to suggestion number three.

Realize that kinesthetic reading style is dominant for most younger children.

Carbo states that the kinesthetic or active style of reading is the most prominent for younger children (39). Kinesthetic reading would include acting out a book with puppets or children as participants. Putting on a play after a book is read brings the story to life. It is not for this paper to question why kinesthetic reading is dominant, but a parent or teacher is wise to keep this in mind. If reading is being done at home, letting children use voices or take "parts" would increase enjoyment. One of the things I remember my father doing is making taped recordings of stories. He had a book of fairy tales. For "Little Red Riding Hood," I was the heroine, and he was the wolf. We recorded the story on tape. Then, I could play the tape whenever I wanted. It was brilliant.

Put on a poetry spectacular.

As a regular feature of the periodical The Reading Teacher, subscribers are allowed to put in suggestions for better reading. One of the readers, Margaret Hoagland, suggested a poetry spectacular. In a classroom setting, she showed the students various types of poetry, including haiku, concrete, and the ballad. Students could either choose famous

poems or original works. She asked them to get into groups and use props or whatever they felt necessary to effectively recite the poem. Parents were invited to the event, as well as other students in the school. The children became excited because poetry was not just a lesson, but a performance (Hoagland 348).

Try buddy/parent journals instead of the traditional personal journal.

One of the best ideas I heard also came from a Reading Teacher mail-in. Pamela Klobukowski started a buddy journal system in her classroom. Many creative writing teachers ask that their students start a journal, but Miss Klobukowski began to notice that most of the journal entries contained basic summaries of the stories being read. There was no analysis being done. Then, she thought up the idea of buddy journals. In pairs of two, students reacted and responded to each other's comments. Since all the students had read the stories, summaries were reduced or cut entirely. Instead, students were forced to discuss the less obvious details.

As an extension of the buddy journals, she asked students to start buddy journals with their parents. This set-up ended up being a wonderful opportunity for both students and parents. Parents forced their children to expand on their sometimes brief comments. In addition, the journals gave the parents and children something to do together, which both parties seemed to enjoy. As an additional benefit to parents, the buddy journals allowed them an excuse to read the children's books they used to love (Klobukowski 348-49).

In a school setting, use the librarian as a resource.

The librarian, when available, can be a valuable resource for teachers. Usually, the librarian knows what books are hot on the market and which ones children will enjoy. Joan Thron said, "Librarians bring us to books with skill and affection" (340). The

librarian can organize book fairs, invite authors, and inform students of reading or writing contests. In a particularly small school, the librarian often knows the preferences of each student. If a student is having problems with reading or does not seem to be enjoying it, the librarian often has a good idea about what the problem might be.

Thron also says that what she appreciates most about librarians is "the librarian's recognition that human interaction between book and reader may be voracious and messy" (341). The statement is an interesting one that deserves exploration. I think Thron sees the librarian as someone who does not try to present books in an organized fashion. Instead, he/she will do whatever is necessary to get children excited about reading. Often, the student will not respond as well to a teacher, who needs to maintain order in the classroom.

I remember once that our librarian at Murdock Elementary, my elementary school, was telling the story of "The Little Red Hen." It is the story where the hen is trying to get various animals to help her make bread. Each of them refuses but is willing to eat the bread as a benefit. The librarian told the story, with her best hen voice. It was glorious to behold. Librarians are special people who can definitely improve a student's reading enjoyment.

These suggestions have proved beneficial when put into practice. However, again each child is an individual. If they don't work for you, make your own "ideas" guide! "ideas" guide!

Art age 7.12.



1-13. Arthur reads next to the computer with pencil in hand.

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